

## CLAIMS

1. An inflatable curtain for protecting the occupants of an automobile,  
comprising:  
a peripheral region;  
an inflatable portion;  
a first stiffening element positioned along at least a portion of the peripheral  
region, wherein during deployment of the inflatable curtain the first stiffening element  
reduces the inflation time of the inflatable portion.

2. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the inflatable portion further  
comprises an inflation inlet for communication with an inflator.

3. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the stiffening element is  
substantially planar.

4. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the first stiffening element  
remains substantially stationary with respect to the length of the inflatable curtain when  
the inflatable portion is inflated.

5. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, further comprising a second stiffening  
element positioned along at least a portion of the peripheral region.

6. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the first stiffening element has a length greater than its width, the inflatable curtain has a length greater than its width, and the length of the first stiffening element is oriented substantially parallel to the length of the inflatable curtain.

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7. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the peripheral region comprises an upper part, and the first stiffening element is positioned along the upper part.

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8. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the stiffening element is formed as an integral portion of the inflatable curtain.

9. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the stiffening element is securely fastened to the inflatable curtain.

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10. The inflatable curtain of claim 9, wherein the stiffening element is a plastic stay.

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11. The inflatable curtain of claim 9, wherein the first stiffening element is stitched to the peripheral region.

12. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the inflatable curtain is tetherless.

13. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, further comprising a tether.

14. The inflatable curtain of claim 1, wherein the peripheral region comprises  
an upper part, and further comprising a connector located along the upper part to secure  
5 the inflatable curtain to the automobile.

2025 RELEASE UNDER E.O. 14176

15. An inflatable curtain for protecting the occupants of an automobile,  
comprising:

a peripheral region;

an inflatable portion comprising an inflation inlet for communication with an  
5 inflator; and

a first substantially planar stiffening element positioned along at least a portion of  
the peripheral region, wherein the first stiffening element remains substantially stationary  
with respect to the length of the inflatable curtain when the inflatable portion is inflated,  
and wherein during deployment of the inflatable curtain the first stiffening element  
10 reduces the inflation time of the inflatable portion.

16. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, further comprising a second stiffening  
element positioned along at least a portion of the peripheral region.

15 17. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, wherein the first stiffening element has  
a length greater than its width, the inflatable curtain has a length greater than its width,  
and the length of the first stiffening element is oriented substantially parallel to the length  
of the inflatable curtain.

20 18. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, wherein the peripheral region  
comprises an upper part, and the first stiffening element is positioned along the upper  
part.

19. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, wherein the stiffening element is formed as an integral portion of the inflatable curtain.

20. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, wherein the stiffening element is securely fastened to the inflatable curtain.

21. The inflatable curtain of claim 20, wherein the stiffening element is a plastic stay.

22. The inflatable curtain of claim 20, wherein the first stiffening element is stitched to the peripheral region.

23. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, wherein the inflatable curtain is tetherless.

24. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, further comprising a tether.

25. The inflatable curtain of claim 15, wherein the peripheral region comprises an upper part, and further comprising a connector located along the upper part to secure the inflatable curtain to the automobile.

26. An inflatable curtain for protecting the occupants of an automobile, the inflatable curtain comprising:

a length and a width, the length being greater than the width;

a peripheral region having an upper part;

5 an inflatable portion comprising an inflation inlet for communication with an inflator;

a connector located on the upper part to secure the inflatable curtain to the automobile; and

a first substantially planar stiffening element having a length greater than its  
10 width, the first stiffening element being positioned along at least a portion of the upper part, wherein the length of the first stiffening element is oriented substantially parallel to the length of the inflatable curtain, wherein the first stiffening element remains substantially stationary with respect to the length of the inflatable curtain when the inflatable portion is inflated, and wherein the first stiffening element reduces the inflation  
15 time of the inflatable portion.

27. The inflatable curtain of claim 26, further comprising a second stiffening element positioned along at least a portion of the peripheral region.

20 28. The inflatable curtain of claim 26, wherein the stiffening element is formed as an integral portion of the inflatable curtain.

29. The inflatable curtain of claim 26, wherein the stiffening element is securely fastened to the inflatable curtain.

5 30. The inflatable curtain of claim 29, wherein the stiffening element is a plastic stay.

31. The inflatable curtain of claim 29, wherein the first stiffening element is stitched to the peripheral region.

10 32. The inflatable curtain of claim 26, wherein the inflatable curtain is tetherless.

33. The inflatable curtain of claim 26, further comprising a tether.